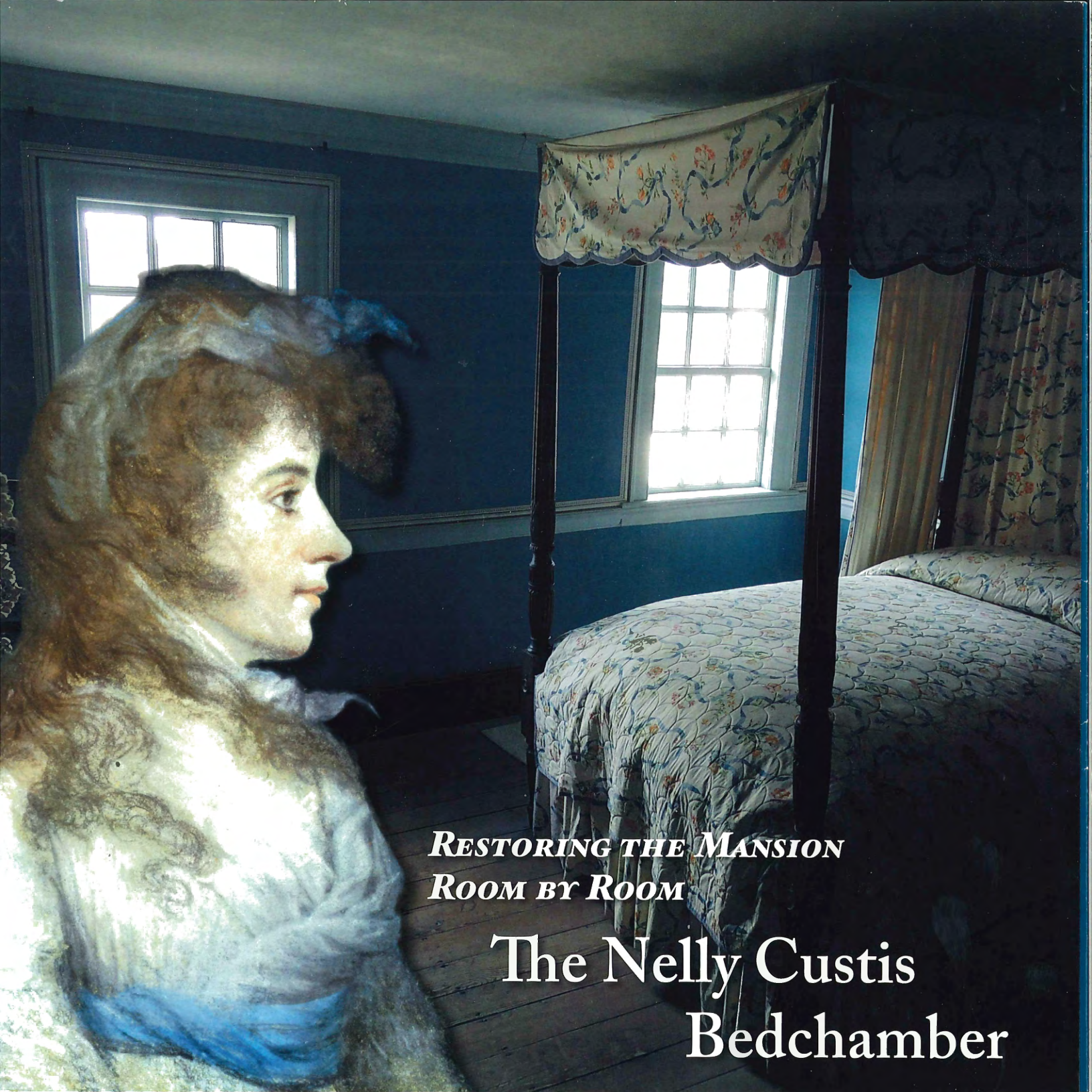




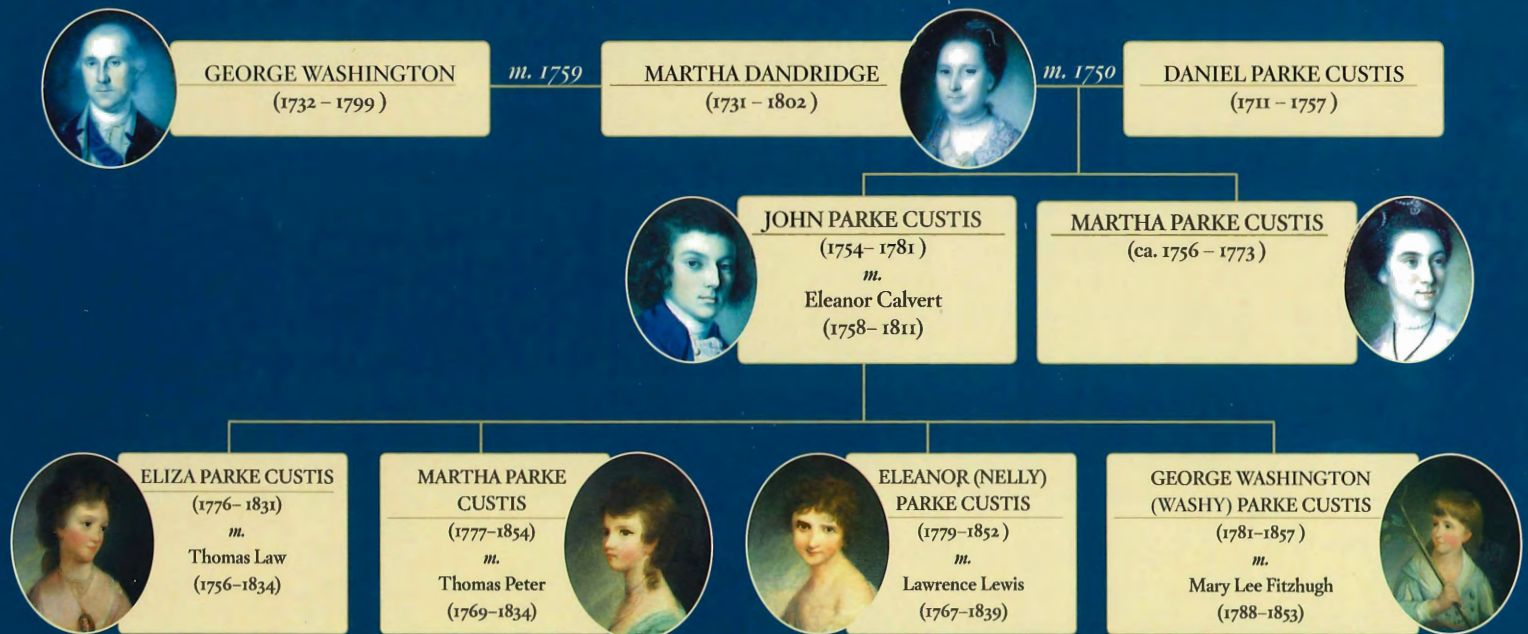
*RESTORING THE MANSION
ROOM BY ROOM*

The Nelly Custis Bedchamber

A Brief Family History

After the American Revolution(1775–1783), George and Martha Washington, at more than fifty years of age, experienced a renewed family life at Mount Vernon. Without children from their own marriage and following the deaths of Martha's children, Patsy and Jacky, the couple helped Jacky's widow to raise her two youngest children, Eleanor (Nelly) Parke Custis and the General's namesake, George Washington (Washy) Parke Custis.

The family returned to Mount Vernon upon Washington's retirement from the presidency in 1797. Shortly afterward, Nelly, now a charming and accomplished young woman, was introduced to Washington's nephew, Lawrence Lewis. The happy couple married in 1799 on Washington's birthday and on November 27, 1799 they welcomed their daughter Frances Parke Lewis, a new great grandchild for the Washingtons. This joyous event was overshadowed by the unexpected death of Nelly's beloved "Grandpapa" a few weeks later, on December 14, 1799. At the time, Nelly was still confined to her bedchamber, recovering from the birth. Nelly, Lawrence, and their growing family remained at Mount Vernon for two more years, until Mrs. Washington passed away. Nelly bid farewell to her childhood home and moved to Woodlawn.



Help Us Tell the Story

A room that overheard the gentle lullabies that welcomed a new baby.

A room that consoled a grieving granddaughter after the death of her beloved stepgrandfather.

*P*recious personal moments make the room memorable.

With your help, we can preserve it.



(1) Nelly Custis's bedstead. (2) Moisture damage above the window. (3) Architectural historian Thomas Reinhart and architectural conservator Neale Nickels examine the room's floor framing. (4) Sun Rising, engraved by Pierre-Charles Canot, published by John Boydell, 1771 (5) Original stone hearth awaiting conservation. (6) Moisture damage has affected the wallpaper and underlying plaster. (7) The rope for the bell system can be seen hanging by the mantle. (8) Cornice cracking in need of repair.



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The Nelly Custis Bedchamber

According to tradition, the bedchamber in the southwest corner of the second floor was used by Nelly during her time at Mount Vernon. While Nelly likely changed her chamber several times over the course of her life, architectural and documentary clues suggest this room may have been used by her upon the birth of her first child. Constructed in 1757–1759 as a part of Washington's second floor addition, this chamber is one of only two on the second floor (outside of the Washingtons') that has a closet retaining its original shelving and peg rail. The room was also apparently the only one on that level connected to the bell system (image 7), allowing its occupant to ring for assistance from the enslaved house staff. Such conveniences suggest that this would have been an ideal chamber for Nelly to stay in as a convalescent new mother.

The furnishings listed in the room on the inventory at the time of George Washington's death, further support this interpretation. These included a close chair (an 18th-century indoor toilet used for individuals of compromised health or physical limitations), and a pine dressing table, likely draped in a white linen or cotton cover and skirt, a popular furniture item used by women during this period. The "elegantly prepared" bedchamber in 1799 would have also included a crib. Though not listed on the inventory (it was Nelly's rather than General Washington's property), the original mahogany crib given to Nelly by Mrs. Washington still occupies the room.



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Preserving History

The Nelly Custis Bedchamber was last restored in the early 1980s, but advances in technology and research now make it possible to undertake a more complete and authentic restoration and refurnishing than was ever before possible.

With your gift today, together we can restore the room to its 1799 appearance, including repairing damaged walls and crown molding, hanging new wallpaper, installing a period-appropriate bedstead, and commissioning reproduction textiles for the bedhangings, crib, dressing table, windows, and floor. After more than thirty years on display to more than one million visitors a year, the current reproduction textiles are in desperate need of replacement. Some, like the curtains, have already been removed due to their deteriorated condition.

In addition, period copies of all five prints listed in the inventory will be returned to the room (only two are currently on view) as well as the pine dressing table and three additional chairs. Items currently in the room, such as the crib, fireplace tools and washbasin, will be conserved. Finally, more personal touches, such as reproduction needlework or infant clothes, hope to be added in order to bring Nelly's room to life for visitors of Washington's historic home.



Mount Vernon Thanks You

Mount Vernon has always relied on the generosity of individuals like you to keep the legacy of George Washington alive. The story of the children he raised as his own is also a part of his legacy which needs to be preserved. We know the walls can't talk, but with your help, we can continue to tell our many visitors the stories of love, life, and loss that took place during Nelly's time in this elegant room.

Thank you for your contribution that allows MVLA to continue its mission to maintain Mount Vernon and preserve artifacts from the life of our first national hero, so his example of character and leadership can continue to inspire future generations.

For more information, please contact the Development Department at 703.799.8647

or supportthisvision@mountvernon.org

George Washington's
MOUNT VERNON

